

A METHODOLOGY FOR PERPETUALLY ENHANCING STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH THE QA PROCESSES & BASED ON STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

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A. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

FACTS:

Drastic changes are constantly taking place in the Higher Education (HE) ecosystem and universities are constantly under pressure to face the new challenges.

Some of the current pressures/challenges:

- ❖ Universities are expected to have a greater economic, social, and cultural impact
- ❖ Pressure for entrepreneurial, student-centred, engaged universities
- ❖ Universities are expected to empower graduates with knowledge, 21st century competencies & skills but also with personal attributes which will prepare them for their future career and role as active citizens.



A. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND [2]

A MEANS TO RESPONDING TO CURRENT CHALLENGES/PRESSURES:

Various transnational policies and numerous publications emphasize **employability** as a tool for tackling the current challenges (Bologna Declaration; World Bank, 2017; THE, 2018; EUA, 2018; UN SDGs, 2019; EC, 2012; ENQA, 2018; Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area-ESG, 2015; ACEEU, 2016).

Employability is a major concern for students and the labor market/society as well, and identifying and meeting their needs is of vital importance to HEIs and to society. (Alves et al. 2010, Diamond, 2008, Beerkens & Udam 2017, Kettunen, 2014, Becket & Brooks, 2006; Hopbach, 2014).



A SUGGESTION

Universities need to identify and implement ways to respond to the **ever-changing** needs and expectations of students and the labor market, in order to continuously ensure employability and drive societal change.



B. OUR PAPER

Presents an approach for perpetually enhancing student employability by engaging the IQA processes of universities and based on continuous feedback from students, the labor market and the academics.

The aim is that the continuous feedback would be used to constantly inform the academic curriculum and L.E. and this in turn will continuously enhance students' knowledge, skills & competencies, and personal attributes.

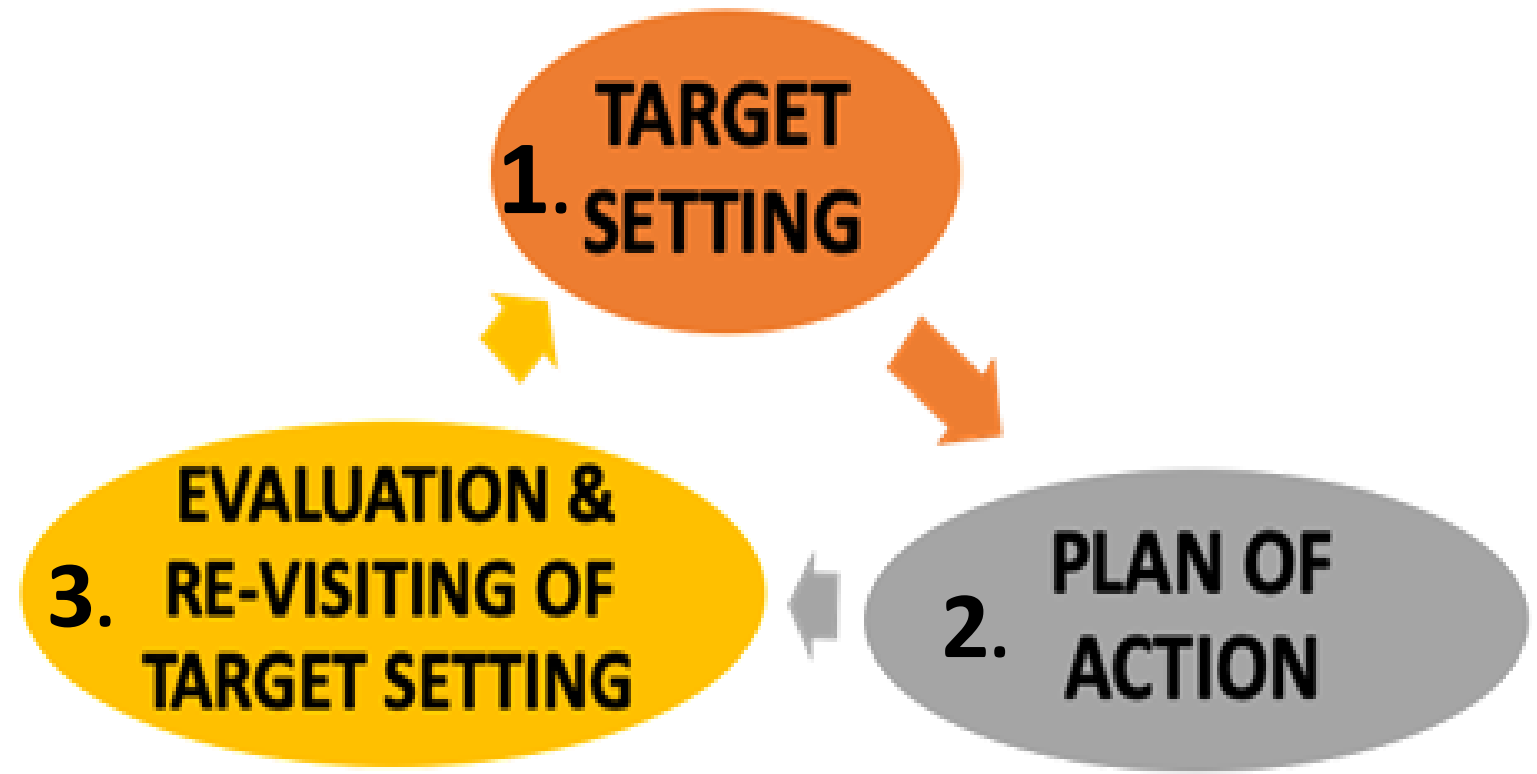
This will enable students to constantly meet the ever-changing needs of industry/society and improve thus therefore employability, contributing thus to societal change.

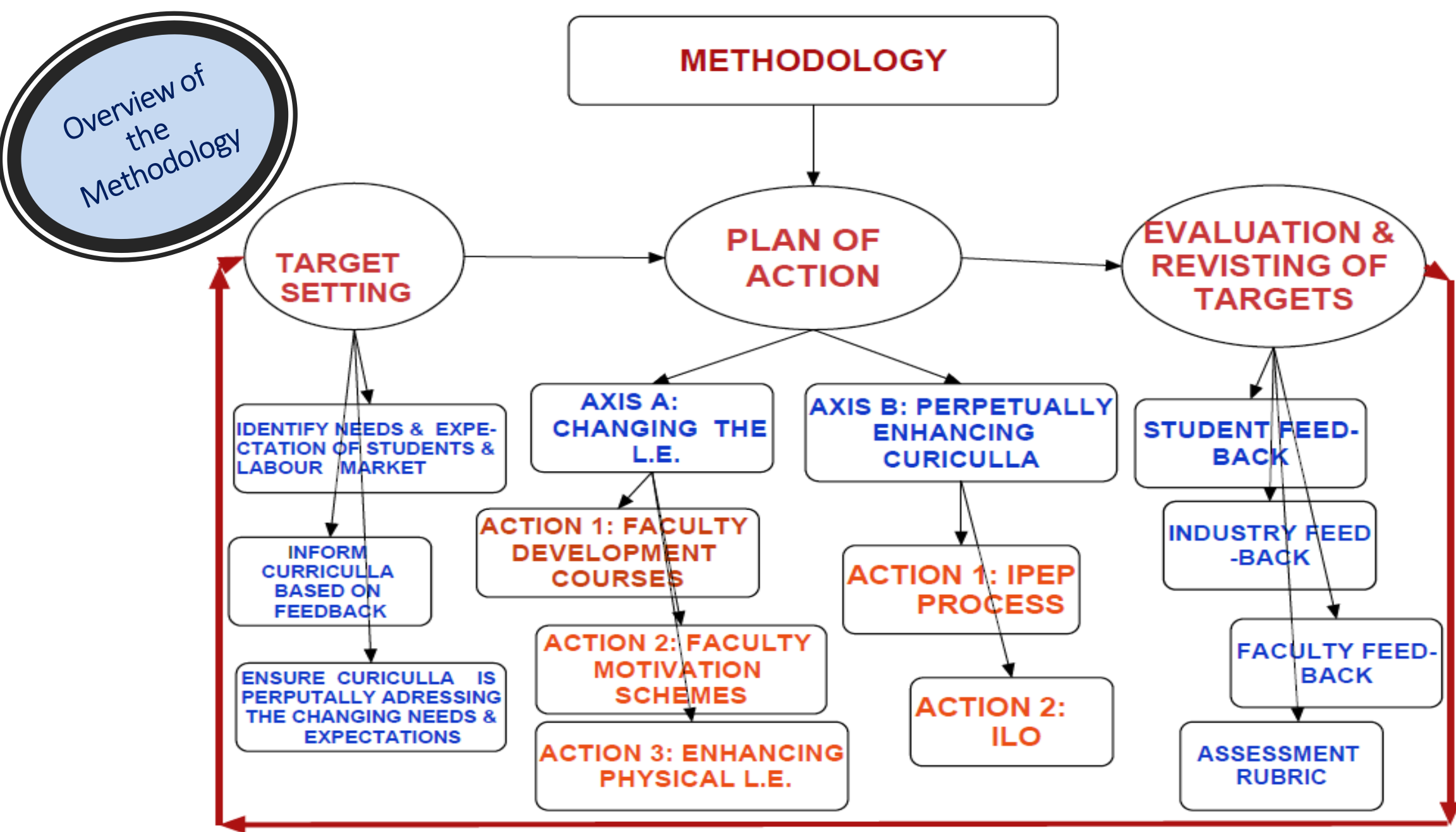
A methodology has been developed and used by our university, and it is proposed in the content of sharing best practices.



C. AN APPROACH TO PERPETUALLY ENHANCING STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH THE QA PROCESSES & BASED ON STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The methodology developed and implemented UNIC, is based on a **3-STEP cycle approach:**





STEP 1: TARGET SETTING

Identification of the targets that need to be set in order to meet our objectives : the enhancement of student employability through the engagement of the internal quality processes, and based on feedback from students and industry/society.

To achieve this, the following targets were set :

- a) the needs and expectations of the students and the labor market with respect to the skills, competencies and attributes profile of students needed by the industry, and society in general, had to be identified
- b) the curricula, the LOs, and the learning environment (L.E.) need to be informed so as to reflect these needs and expectations, and
- c) the above need to be addressed through an ongoing process, as those needs and expectations are constantly changing.

These targets were communicated, by Senior Management, to all relevant parties (Deans, Heads of Dept., Heads of Pedagogical Unit, IQAC, etc).

STEP 2: PLAN OF ACTION

To reach our targets, a plan of action was needed.

As shown in Diagram 1 above, our plan of action evolved around **2 Axis:**

AXIS A: Changing the Learning Environment

Action A1: Faculty Professional Development Courses

Action A2: Faculty Motivation Schemes

Action A3: Enhancing the Physical L.E.

AXIS B: Perpetually enhancing the Curricula based on feedback.

Action B1 : IPEP Process

Action B2: ILO

STEP 2: PLAN OF ACTION

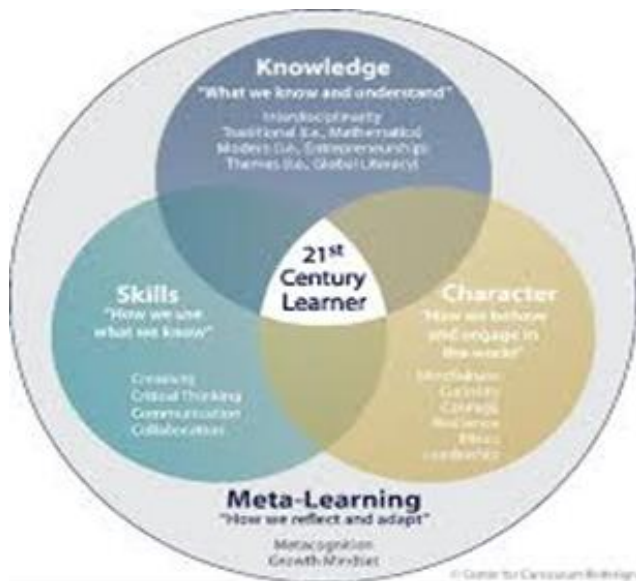
AXIS A: Changing the Learning Environment

ACTION 1A : Professional Development courses

The expected characteristics, skills and knowledge of the 21st century students differ greatly from those of the previous century.

Thus, the L.E. should address the high-level operational knowledge, competencies and personality qualities expected from students.

For creating therefore the academics of the 21st Century, UNIC developed and offers to all Academic and Teaching staff a 36-hour Professional Development Training Workshop through its Pedagogical Support Unit and DL Pedagogical Support Unit (e-PSU)



CCR Model for 21st Century Learner,



STEP 2: PLAN OF ACTION

AXIS A: Changing the Learning Environment

Action A2: Faculty Motivation schemes

Recognizing the high value of teaching, the UNIC introduced the **Excellence in Teaching Award**.

The aim of the award is to further motivating academics to prepare themselves in addressing the 21st century classroom needs.

This award is granted based on criteria, such as:

- connection of research and teaching
- the use of Project/ Problem- Based learning
- introducing of ICTs
- effectiveness of learning
- authentic assessment
- measuring learning effectiveness
- updating of the curricula.



STEP 2: PLAN OF ACTION

AXIS A: Changing the Learning Environment

Action A3: Enhancing Physical Infrastructure of the Learning Environment

Acknowledging the importance of the physical infrastructure of the learning environment (LE), the university is in the process of changing the physical learning environment characteristics in a manner that it will support the effectiveness of learning.



STEP 2: PLAN OF ACTION

AXIS B: Perpetual Curriculum Enhancement

ACTION B1: The Internal Programme Evaluation Process (IPEP) as a tool for Re-engineering the programmes of study

IPEP is a process developed and used at the UNIC for the development and/or re-engineering of programmes of study.

This process is based on feedback from students, internal and external academics and industry experts.

The feedback is used for re-visiting the course/module syllabi and LO's, the learning and assessment material, the human and physical infrastructure, etc., so that programmes would be perpetually improved in a manner that addresses the ever-changing needs and expectations of the labor market, of the graduates and society.....

The internal 2-year programme evaluation process (IPEP) at the University of Nicosia

Prepared by Rector Pouyioutas (September 2017) and

Revised based on Input from the VRAA and the Deans

Revised July 2018 as per deadlines, following the new DIPAE submission deadline

	ITEM/REPORT/FORM PRODUCED	Initial Deadline	Revised deadline
1	Appointment of Internal Team of Reviewers (ITR) by Department.	FEB 2018	
	Appointment of External Team of Reviewers (ETR) by Department.		
2	Completion of DIPAE relevant form(s) by Programme coordinator and submission to the ITR and ETR.	MARCH 2018	JUNE 2018
3	ITR obtains feedback for the Programme from faculty, students, alumni and industry experts; ITR examines relevant documents, course syllabi, learning & assessment material, infrastructure.	JUNE 2018	AUGUST 2018

STEP 2: PLAN OF ACTION :

AXIS B: Perpetual Curriculum Enhancement

ACTION B1: The Internal Programme Evaluation Process (IPEP) as a tool for Re-engineering the programmes of study [2]

The IPEP process is carried out at a departmental level (by the Head of Department/Programme Coordinator) and it is repeated every 4 years.

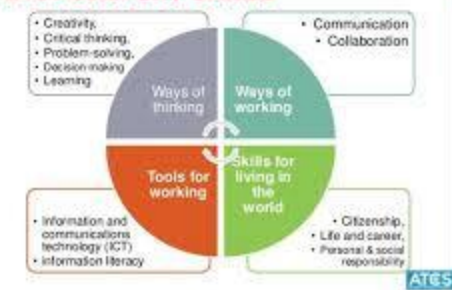
The feedback received is used to identify improvements needed.

As an outcome of the recent IPEP exercise, UNIC identified a pressing need to:

- Revise the LOs of the curricula in a manner that would address the needs for the 21st century skills, competencies and knowledge needed by graduates, as well as the need to address the SDG's through the curricula.
- Enhance its programmes of study by incorporating work-placement in the curricula, of all programmes of study



FOUR CATEGORIES OF 21ST-CENTURY SKILLS



GETTING STARTED WITH THE SDGS IN UNIVERSITIES

A GUIDE FOR UNIVERSITIES, HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, AND THE ACADEMIC SECTOR



STEP 2: PLAN OF ACTION : (ii) Perpetual Curriculum Enhancement

ACTION B1: The Internal Programme Evaluation Process (IPEP) as a tool for Re-engineering the programmes of study [3]

Relevant decisions were taken at various levels (Senate, Dept.) and we proceeded in that direction:

- a. LOs of programmes and courses/modules were revisited (in line with the above).
- b. Work-placement/internship had to be incorporated into as many programmes of study as possible.
 - UNIC had then to identify ways for placing students in the work environment in a manner that would address the targets set.



STEP 2: PLAN OF ACTION

AXIS B: Perpetual Curriculum Enhancement

ACTION B2: The UNIC Labor Market Liaison Office (ILO)

The ILOs were developed within the framework of the project "Development and Operation of Industry Liaison Offices at the Universities operating in the Republic of Cyprus".

The project is part of the Operational Program "Employment, Human Resources and Social Cohesion" and it is funded by the European Union's Structural Funds and from national funds with an amount of € 7,1 million.

The project invites universities operating in the Republic of Cyprus (Public and Private) to participate with the aim of enhancing graduate employability and social cohesion.



STEP 2: PLAN OF ACTION

AXIS B: Perpetual Curriculum Enhancement

ACTION B2: The UNIC Labor Market Liaison Office (ILO)[2]

Within the frame of this project and in line with its targets and plan of action , UNIC decided to establish its own ILO, with main goals of:

- supporting the collaboration between the Univ. and the industry
- Identifying the needs and expectations of students & market/society
- Providing feedback to HoDs so that the curricula would be informed accordingly through the quality assurance processes of the university.

The underlying aim is that student employability would be enhanced, the needs and of the market would be met, and university societal engagement would be improved.



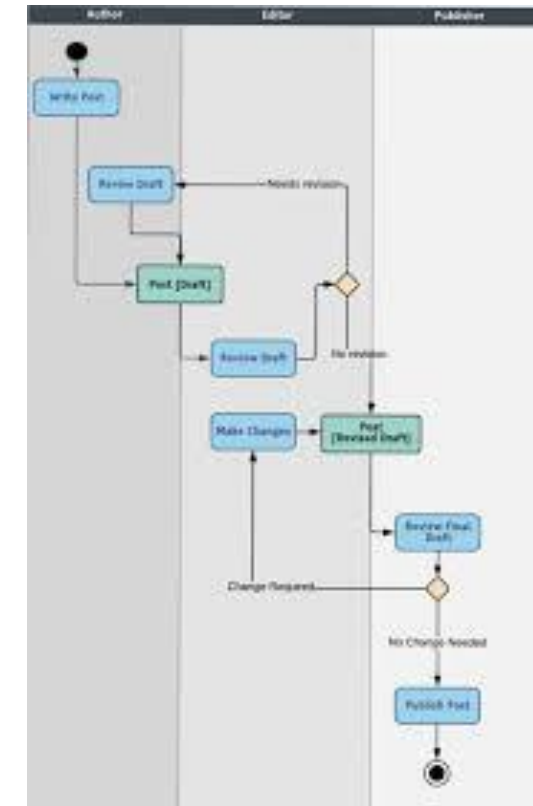
STEP 2: PLAN OF ACTION

AXIS B: Perpetual Curriculum Enhancement

ACTION B2: The UNIC Labor Market Liaison Office (ILO) [3]

To meet the requirements of the project and achieve its targets, the ILO of the University of Nicosia utilized the following approach:

1. Proceeded in building bridges with the labor market actors and identifying their needs and expectations for student skills, competencies and general profile/attributes.
2. Informed students of the need for and the value of work placement and made every effort to convince them that this would be a valuable tool for enhancing their employability and career.
3. Proceeded in identifying student skills, competencies and general attributes through interviews with students and analysis of their CV's
4. Met with Heads of Departments and/or Programme Coordinators to identify ways to integrate work placement in as many programmes of study as possible.

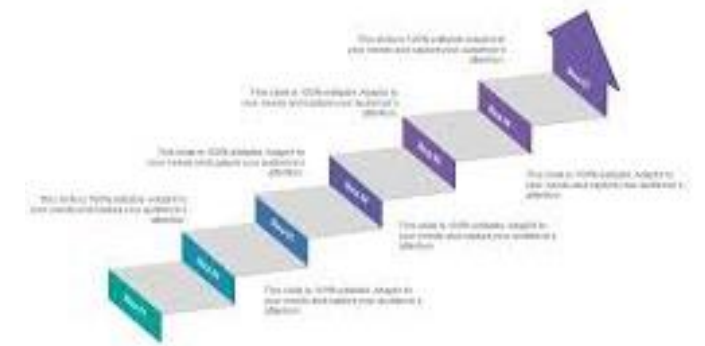


STEP 2: PLAN OF ACTION

AXIS B: Perpetual Curriculum Enhancement

ACTION B2: The UNIC Labor Market Liaison Office (ILO)[4]

5. Secured work placement opportunities for students by entering into agreements with the labor market players.
6. Announced to students the availability of work placement as part of their academic path through a call for an expression of interested for an internship.
7. Developed a data base and recorded (i) information relating to the students that expressed an interest for an internship (programme of study, skills and competencies, other work experience, general information, etc.), and (ii) the industry placement opportunities and specifically the subject area, host organization, specific labor market requirements from students (skills, competencies, general profile).
8. Matched student profiles with labor market requirements and proceeded with student placement arrangements.
9. Monitored student progress while in their placement and handled all communication with host organization while constantly collaborating with the students' academic supervisor.



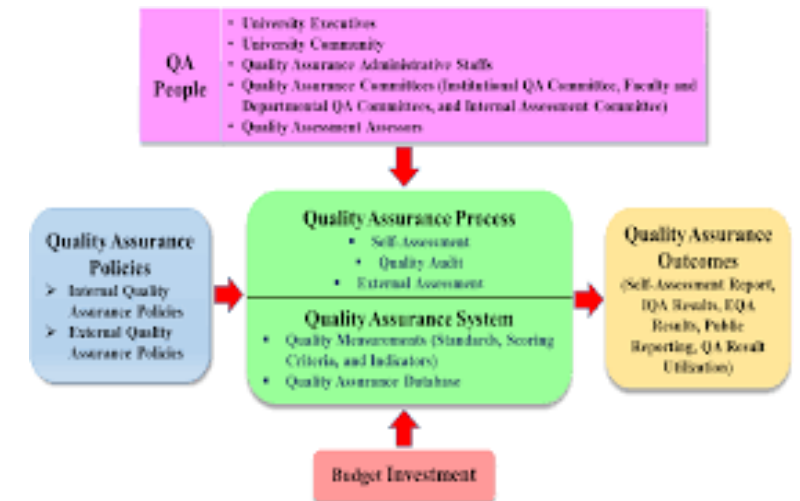
STEP 2: PLAN OF ACTION

AXIS B: Perpetual Curriculum Enhancement

ACTION B2: The UNIC Labor Market Liaison Office (ILO)[5]

The QA processes involved include, among others:

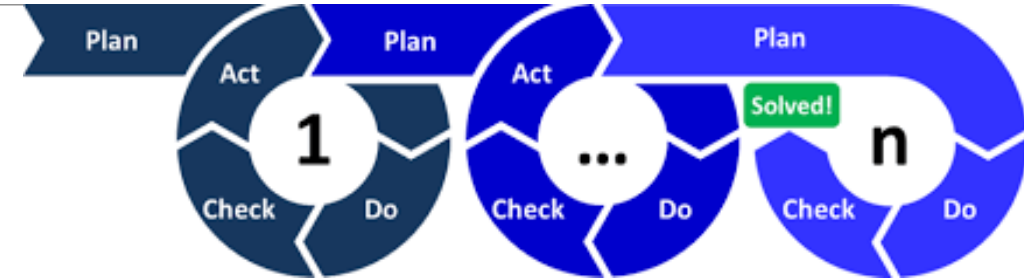
- the engagement of the academicians for the development of the module and its ECTS, LO's, and assessment methods,
- the assessment of the students' performance by the host organization,
- the assessment of the student by the academics,
- monitoring of the placement,
- keeping of log book by students and submitting a self-reflection essay,



STEP 3: EVALUATION & RE-VISITING OF TARGET SETTING

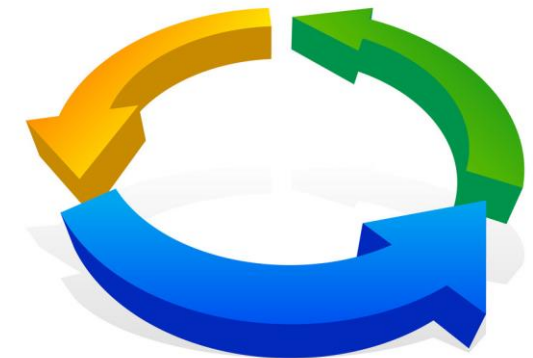
The last Step involves:

- data collection and analysis
- comparison against expected targets (for determining if the objectives are met), and
- identifying any adjustments needed so that a new cycle will begin.



For this, feedback is needed from all stakeholders involved. As part of the Methodology, feedback is obtained from (a) students, (b) labor market, and (c) academics:

- Students evaluate the utility of the placement[at the end] from the viewpoint of academic values pertinent to their programme of study and with respect to the value of the placement in relation to their future employability.
- Host organization provides feedback on student's performance on various skills & competencies, knowledge and general attributes as well as on any mismatch identified.
- Academics are provided with the feedback received so that they can identify any mismatches that need to be addressed through the curricula, the LO's and L.E.



STEP 3: EVALUATION & RE-VISITING OF TARGET SETTING [2]


BASED ON FEEDBACK: the TARGETS and Plan of Action will be re-visited and revised, as needed, in a continuous loop.

This loop is what the authors consider to make this methodology stand out.

Furthermore:

Currently the PSU and the ePSU of UNIC is collaborating with academics for developing **assessment rubrics** as tools for evaluating students' competencies, skills and personal traits, so that areas of strengths and weaknesses would be identified.

The Rubrics are now in the validation stage.

	Very Good	Good	Developing
 Research and collecting information 6	I collected lots of information from various places, such as books, the internet etc.	I collected some information from a few places.	I only collected little information from few places.
Sharing 8	I always shared my information or ideas with all my team members.	I sometimes shared information or ideas with my team members.	I shared little information or ideas with my team members.
Completing tasks 8	I met all deadlines and I was not late for meetings or to complete work.	I met most deadlines and was only late for some meetings and to complete work.	I missed many deadlines and was often late for meetings or to complete work.
Contribution 8	I always helped every team member with all tasks, such as gathering information, editing work.	I helped some of my team members, but not all to gather information and edit work.	I didn't help my team mates to gather information, edit work etc.
Listening to other group members 5	I always listened to the ideas and suggestions from my team.	I sometimes listened to ideas and suggestions from my team.	I didn't listen to my other team members. I often did it my own way.
Co-operating with my team 5	I never argued with my team members. I always talked about ideas and got everyone's opinion.	I sometimes argued with my team. I sometimes talked about ideas and thought about some opinions.	I often argued with my team mates. I never listened to their ideas and didn't think about their opinions.

21st Century Employability Skills



The suggested use of this rubric involves a monthly analysis of student employability. A student will self-assess their employability skills and compare their findings with a teacher's observations in a conference format. A consensus is reached through dialogue, goals determined, and an average score assigned for the student.

Standard	4	3	2	1
Communication and work productivity skills by: • asking for help when needed • completing tasks on time • using time effectively understanding to become productive and the quality of work.	Effectively communicates and works productively by: • asking for help when needed • completing different assignments • using time effectively understanding to become productive and the quality of work.	Effectively communicates and works productively by: • asking for help when needed • completing different assignments • using time effectively understanding to become productive and the quality of work.	Effectively communicates and works productively by: • asking for help when needed • completing different assignments • using time effectively understanding to become productive and the quality of work.	Effectively communicates and works productively by: • asking for help when needed • completing different assignments • using time effectively understanding to become productive and the quality of work.
Adapt to various roles and responsibilities by: • working flexibly to changes of assignments • changing priorities • self-regulating behavior • self-managing others	Adapt to various roles and responsibilities by: • working flexibly to changes of assignments • changing priorities • self-regulating behavior • self-managing others	Adapt to various roles and responsibilities by: • working flexibly to changes of assignments • changing priorities • self-regulating behavior • self-managing others	Adapt to various roles and responsibilities by: • working flexibly to changes of assignments • changing priorities • self-regulating behavior • self-managing others	Adapt to various roles and responsibilities by: • working flexibly to changes of assignments • changing priorities • self-regulating behavior • self-managing others
Teamwork skills: • working with others to achieve common goals • working with others to achieve common goals	Teamwork skills: • working with others to achieve common goals • working with others to achieve common goals	Teamwork skills: • working with others to achieve common goals • working with others to achieve common goals	Teamwork skills: • working with others to achieve common goals • working with others to achieve common goals	Teamwork skills: • working with others to achieve common goals • working with others to achieve common goals
Problem-solving skills: • identifying problems and solutions • identifying problems and solutions • identifying problems and solutions	Problem-solving skills: • identifying problems and solutions • identifying problems and solutions • identifying problems and solutions	Problem-solving skills: • identifying problems and solutions • identifying problems and solutions • identifying problems and solutions	Problem-solving skills: • identifying problems and solutions • identifying problems and solutions • identifying problems and solutions	Problem-solving skills: • identifying problems and solutions • identifying problems and solutions • identifying problems and solutions
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D. CONCLUSSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper presents a methodology for contiguously enhancing student employability, and driving thus societal change

The idea is that employability could be addressed by informing the academic curricula and the L.E. based on feedback from students, industry/society, and the academics through engaging the university's IQA processes.

The perpetual feedback and evaluation from students, the labor market and the academics aims in continuously identifying and meeting the constantly changing needs and expectations for employability.

The main advantage thus of this methodology is the closing of the loop.



D. CONCLUSSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS [2]

The value of this methodology, which we propose in the content of sharing best practices, is documented by:

- (a) The very positive feedback received so far both from students and labor market, especially for the impact in enhancing students' skills, competencies and personality traits.
- (b) The input from academics for the usefulness of the pedagogical training received.
- (c) The resulting re-visiting of curricula, LO's and LE, based on the feedback received from student placements and from the professional training, in a manner that continuously addresses the needs and expectations of key HE stakeholders: students, industry and society in general, and academia.
- (d) The increase in the interest expressed by students and the industry/society for placements.



Thank you

Discussion ?